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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2994  
INFO RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 6589  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 4356  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA PRIORITY 7259  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000165

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NEA/ELA; TREASURY FOR CURTAIN

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [AFIN](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: SYRIA COUNTRY CLEARANCE KENNETH CURTAIN AND  
KRISTOFER DOUCETTE, FEBRUARY 23-27

REF: DEPT OF TREASURY 141633Z

¶1. Embassy Damascus welcomes and grants country clearance for the proposed visit of Kenneth Curtain and Kristofer Doucette, Representatives of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, 23-27 February 2007. Travelers will be met and assisted at the airport, after clearing customs, by an embassy driver, who will display a sign with the Visitors' names.

¶2. Control officer and point of contact for this visit is Economic Officer, Stacey Jones, who can be reached at work: (963)-(11) 3391-3910; cell: (963) 093-302-143; home: (963)-(11)371-3279; or embassy fax number: (963)-(11) 3391-3999.

¶3. Action Request: Each visitor must bring a copy of travel orders or provide fiscal data to cover the costs of the visit. Costs include, but are not limited to, American and FSN overtime, border crossing fees, field travel by Embassy employees, transportation costs for official vehicles, long distance telephone calls, equipment rentals, representational events, and other costs directly attributable to the visit. Upon requesting hotel reservations, visitor should provide a credit card number to guarantee the reservations and must let Post know at least 24 hours in advance of any amendment or cancellation of the reservations to avoid personal credit card charges. Any hotel cancellation charges will be billed to the traveler.

¶4. Persons arriving in Syria on a single entry visa and who will be staying in excess of 10 days are required to obtain a "verification stamp" in their passports after their arrival. Visitors should also confirm onward flight reservations 72 hours prior to departure.

¶5. Visa Requirement: Every traveler must have a valid Syrian visa prior to departure for Damascus. The Syrian government will not/not normally grant airport or border visas. Travelers should apply for visas well in advance, as processing time is often slow. Currently, Syrian visas for Americans can only be issued by the Syrian Embassy in Washington. Persons traveling on passports bearing an Israeli visa or entry or exit stamp, or persons born in the Gaza region or of Gazan descent, will be refused entry to Syria. The Syrian government rigidly enforces restrictions on prior travel to Israel. Israeli stamps in passports, Jordanian entry cachets, or cachets from Egypt or other countries that suggest prior travel to Israel, may cause Syrian immigration authorities to refuse the traveler admission to Syria. Likewise, the absence of entry stamps from a country adjacent to Israel, which the traveler has

just visited, will cause Syrian immigration officials to refuse admittance. American citizen travelers suspected of having traveled to Israel have been detained for questioning.

¶6. Luggage and Transit: As airlines try to fill flights completely, the incidences of luggage not Following passengers onboard have increased, especially when transiting Europe onto smaller aircraft bound for Syria. All official travelers are cautioned to check with their airline at transit points en route to Syria (e.g., Paris and Amsterdam) to ensure that their luggage remains with their flight. Post recommends that travelers from Washington avoid transiting Paris en route to Syria, as luggage often arrives late. Travelers should include any essential items in carry-on luggage.

¶7. Security Requirements: Thank you for providing confirmation of Mr. Curtain and Mr. Doucette's Top Secret Clearance. All visitors must receive a briefing from the regional security office upon arrival.

¶8. Transportation: An embassy expediter will meet Mr. Curtain and Mr. Doucette after clearing immigration and customs and transport them to their hotel. Post will also arrange for transportation to and from official meetings.

¶9. Lodging: Two single rooms have been reserved at The Cham Palace for the nights of 23-26 February 2007. The hotel phone number is: 963-(11) 223-2300; fax number is 963-(11) 3391-4700. The room rate is USD 90 plus 10 percent service, plus 11 percent tax per night. This is within per diem and does include breakfast. The Cham Palace hotel does accept major credit cards.

¶10. Communications Support: Long-distance telephone calls

(for official business only) can be placed from the Embassy if the traveler provides a fund cite or has authorization from the appropriate agency or section head at Post. The internet can be accessed through a stand-alone PC in the Embassy on a first-come, first-served basis. There is no charge for this service. The internet can also be accessed from hotels in Damascus by dialing to one of three different ISP's in Syria. There are also several internet "cafes" in Damascus.

¶11. Currency Exchange: Due to local requirements that non-residents pay their hotel bill in foreign currency, Post will disburse a full day of per diem in dollars for each night spent in country. The Embassy Class B Cashier provides accommodation exchange from dollars to Syrian pounds at the current rate for institutions, against cash, traveler's checks, and, with the authorization of the financial management officer, personal checks. Reverse accommodation exchange is not authorized, in accordance with Syrian government regulations. Personal checks cannot be cashed on the final day of the employee's stay. The last check must be presented at least one day before departure. Travelers can also purchase pounds at branches of the Commercial Bank of Syria. It is illegal to exchange money except at authorized exchange points (i.e., the Embassy and branches of the Commercial Bank).

¶12. Photography: Photography of individuals in uniform (including police), government buildings, and military installations is strictly forbidden.

¶13. Travel to Lebanon: Any official travel to Lebanon from Syria by U.S. government employees of any nationality is strictly subject to country clearance from Embassy Beirut. Unofficial travel to Lebanon of U.S. government employees and dependents also requires advance clearance both from Embassy Beirut and from the Department of State.

¶14. Departure Tax: Syria charges a departure tax of SP200 (approximately \$4), payable in SP cash only. Travelers with diplomatic passports are exempt, but those with official passports must pay.

¶15. Health: Health facilities in Damascus are not up to U.S. or European standards, and facilities outside Damascus are extremely limited. Only personnel covered under the State Department's medical program and with a valid medical clearance for Syria are eligible for medevac at USG cost. It is recommended that all other travelers have medical evacuation insurance sufficient to cover evacuation by chartered air ambulance, or ensure that their agency will cover the cost.

¶16. Threat Assessment: Political developments and security in the Middle East sometimes change quickly. The Embassy was attacked, without warning, in September 2006, by a small group of terrorists using automatic gunfire and grenades. They attempted, unsuccessfully, to detonate a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device at the rear gate. One local guard was seriously injured and there was at least one Syrian fatality in addition to the killing of the four attackers. Since the attack, the Embassy has taken additional measures to improve its security posture. In February 2005, the former Prime Minister of Lebanon was assassinated in Beirut, prompting the U.S. to recall its Ambassador to Syria for consultations. There are no plans to assign a replacement, reflecting the ongoing difficulties in U.S.-Syrian relations. Government-sanctioned demonstrations have occasionally included expressions of anti-American or anti-Western sentiment. Violent mobs attacked three Scandinavian embassies in February 2006. In general, Americans in Syria should vary their schedules, avoid large crowds and gatherings, and report suspicious incidents to the Regional Security Officer. They should also avoid electronic financial transactions and should not carry valuables or large amounts of cash in crowded shopping districts. Visitors should also read and follow the guidance in the latest public announcements and State Department travel advisories for Syria.

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